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RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 1146  
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SUBJECT: WORLDWIDE MARCHES AGAINST THE FARC PLANNED FOR  
FEBRUARY 4

¶1. (U) Summary: A non-partisan Colombian student group is organizing marches against kidnapping and the FARC in 148 cities around the world on February 4. The students are using the web-site Facebook to organize the events, and the initiative enjoys widespread popular support. Still, the opposition Polo Democratico Alternativo (Polo) Party has criticized the marches, claiming they will spark political polarization and favor President Uribe. The Polo will organize a separate gathering against kidnappings and the war on the same day in Bogota. Participants have decided against holding marches in Caqueta and Huila--departments where the FARC remains active--due to fear of FARC reprisals. End Summary.

#### MARCH AGAINST THE FARC

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¶2. (U) Colombian students around the world created the group 'Colombia Soy Yo' to garner support and members for their initiative against violence, kidnapping and the FARC. Using Facebook, they created the event 'A Million Voices Against the FARC' to organize marches against the FARC around the world on February 4. A separate web-site is translated into ten languages. The students are organizing marches in 148 cities on four continents, including 30 in Colombia. Organizers are selling t-shirts with the logo "No More! No More Kidnapping! No More Lies! No More Murder! No More FARC!" The initiative has attracted widespread popular support in Colombia, where polls show 98% of the population opposes the terrorist group.

¶3. (U) The student group is non-partisan, but is receiving support from many Colombian political parties and communities. An organizer in Bucaramanga said, "We started with a snowball, and with each day the movement has grown into an avalanche. The people have responded, because they are tired of FARC violence." In Colombia, marches are planned in all major cities. In many locations, local mayors, such as the Medellin Mayor Alonso Salazar, support the initiative. In Barranquilla, the march will be led by the Queen of Carnaval.

#### CRITICISM AGAINST THE MARCH

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¶4. (U) The march has rekindled internal divisions within the opposition Polo Party over the appropriate stance toward the

FARC. After extensive internal debate, Polo President Carlos Gaviria announced on January 30 that his party would not participate in the marches but would instead gather in the Plaza de Bolivar to advocate a humanitarian accord and voice opposition to the war. The United Workers Federation (CUT), teachers federation (Fecode), several family members of hostages, and Polo Bogota Mayor Samuel Moreno will participate. Polo Congressman Wilson Borja explained that "when you march against the FARC, you are marching in favor of Uribe. Both are militarists." Polo Senator Gustavo Petro criticized the decision, and said he would participate in the march.

15. (U) Other critics, such as El Tiempo op-ed writer and Uribe biographer Maria Jimena Duzan, argued that the marches will contribute to political polarization and jeopardize efforts to reach agreement on a humanitarian exchange. Duzan voiced concern that President Uribe and his supporters will co-opt the marches to promote a "false sense of nationalism" against the FARC and build support for a second reelection attempt. Other critics complained the marches only oppose the FARC and do not address crimes by the paramilitaries. Still, Duzan said she would participate.

#### SECURITY REMAINS A CONCERN

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16. (U) Fear of retaliation remains a concern in departments where the FARC remains active. Families of hostages, civil society groups, and local authorities in Caqueta and Huila departments voiced concern that the FARC will use violence in communities taking part in the marches. A mayor in Huila said there is no need to "rock the boat and start declaring war on everyone." Similarly, the Governor of Huila stated that he will support such "initiatives of the people," but

cautioned that the government will not help organize them.  
Brownfield